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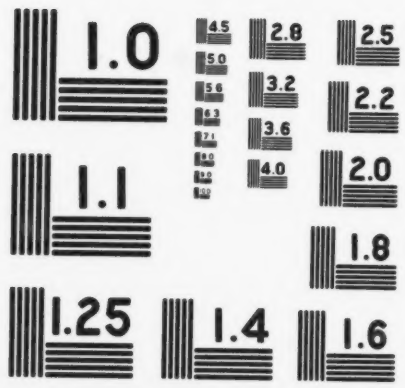

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A DAY TREATMENT PROGRAM'S APPROACH TO CHILDREN WITH SEVERE LEARNING DISORDERS.

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A PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL SMALL GROUP APPROACH WAS USED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ELEMENTARY CHILDREN WITH SEVERE LEARNING DISORDERS. SIX CHILDREN WERE SERVED THREE HOURS PER WEEK BY THIS HIGHLY STRUCTURED, TASK-ORIENTED, DAY TREATMENT PROGRAM. TWO BOYS WERE INVOLVED IN ONE-TO-ONE THERAPY AND ALL BUT TWO OF THE CHILDREN WERE ABLE TO ATTEND REGULAR SCHOOL IN ADDITION TO DAY TREATMENT. WEEKLY CONTACTS WERE MAINTAINED WITH PARENTS. PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL METHODS WERE USED TO DEVELOP THE PROGRAM, WHICH SOUGHT TO REMOVE NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD LEARNING BY INVOLVING CHILDREN IN SUCCESSFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCES WITH SIGNIFICANT EGO-ENHANCING FEEDBACK. CONFERENCES WITH TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND THE PSYCHIATRIC TEAM INDICATE THAT THE PROGRAM HAD FAVORABLE RESULTS. OBSERVATIONAL EVALUATIVE TECHNIQUES SHOW THAT ALTHOUGH ACADEMIC SKILLS REMAINED WEAK, THE CHILDREN WERE MORE ATTENTIVE, BETTER RELATED TO THEIR PEERS, AND HAPPIER. SCHOOL FOLLOW-UP HAS INDICATED THAT SUSTAINED BEHAVICRAL AND ATTITUDINAL IMPROVEMENT CONTINUES. (SK)

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A DAY TREATMENT PROGRAM'S APPROACH TO CHILDREN WITH SEVERE LEARNING DISORDERS

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In many instances, psychotherapy for the functional non-learner of elementary school age does not achieve the practical goal of engaging the child's interest in academic experiences. The traditional tutoring approaches are equally ineffective with this type of child. Although our experiences at conducting a Day Treatment Program showed that our services were used by children with behavior disorders predominantly, there was an increasing number of children referred for learning disorders. Feeling strongly that the non-learning child needed an opportunity for the emotional reappraisal of the learning situation, while simultaneously carrying out the exercise of learning, the development of a group to serve these children began.

Most of these children were easily contained within a regular school, behaviorally, and could therefore be maintained in both experiences. This was also a necessity since the Day Treatment services were of a limited nature. The capacity of this group was to be no more than six children with two staff members, one a teacher, the other a teaching aid. The children were selected on the basis of psychiatric work up and were evaluated further using the following screening criteria:

Group Screening Criteria

1. Ages 7-10 (Mixed Group)
2. Group size 6
3. Ego impairment

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4. Limited academic skills
5. Developmental Deviations such as:
   a. Deviations in Motor Development
   b. " " Sensory "
   c. " " Speech "
   d. " " Cognitive functions
6. Parental participation in therapy

Group Meetings 2 1/2 hrs. twice weekly

Three children were selected to form the nucleus of this group before it began meeting regularly. An attempt was made to stack the group so that the whole nucleus of it was not composed of inhibited youngsters. The feeling was that one of these children could be a more hyperactive, restless child, where limits had to be imposed, so that other members (too inhibited at expressing affect) could derive therapeutic value from the "antiseptic techniques" of limit setting. The value of the "contagion effect" in groups could therefore be utilized as a diluting mechanism for the members of the group. Two of the three boys in the nucleus were clinic referred, therefore, were already involved in one-to-one therapy and had fairly extensive workups prior to Day Treatment enrollment. Two of the boys were able to attend regular school in addition to Day Treatment. One of the boys in the nucleus was not attending regular school because of an over-involvement with mother. The individual therapy hours of the children in the group were established preceding Day Treatment or immediately following it so that transportation problems would be kept to a minimum. Involvement of the parent or parents was established on the basis of weekly contacts, although there was flexibility on the part of the parent's worker in many instances.

The structure of the program was developed through the use of psychoeducational methods. These methods were designed to remove negative attitudes towards learning and replace them with as many successful learning experiences to help the child regain a feeling of adequacy and self-worth. The four prongs of the program that follow in outline form offer a highly structured, task-oriented, well-ordered sequence of experiences in areas that offered the child the most significant ego-enhancing feedback.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE DAY TREATMENT

Group II

1. Adaptive School Period

65 Min. Period
- A. Show and tell
- B. Word recognition skills
- C. Phonic activities
- D. Language skills (oral reading)
- E. Number concept development
- F. Writing
- G. Science (demonstrations)

2. Handwork Period

40 Min. Period
- A. Correlated projects
- B. Simple wood working projects
- C. Tool use exercises
- D. Simple refinishing projects
- E. Crafts skill developments

3. Physical Education and Recreation Period

15 Min. Period
- A. Large motor activities
- B. Low level competitive games
- C. Quiet games (table)

4. Snack and Story Time

15 Min. Period
- A. Setting and cleaning table
- B. Story reading
  1. Student
  2. Staff
- C. Library time.

TECHNIQUES AND EXPERIENCES FOR ENGAGEMENT IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

One can discern from the structure that considerable effort is made to utilize existing skills in performance areas that can serve as a vehicle for re-engaging the child in the learning process. In this group many weeks were spent at providing high success-oriented learning experiences; their value was not in what the child was learning, rather, in the quality of their ego-massaging effect upon the child's attitude towards learning.

At the start of the group a general index of each child's residual learning capacity was made. In most instances, reading level was the barometer since this was usually the presenting problem. If the child had middle first grade skills we arbitrarily subtracted one full year and used this as our starting point. The introduction of teaching materials at this grade level was begun immediately. Experiences that required performance in the areas of greatest resistance, such as oral reading, comprehension exercises, etc., were deleted. Lotto boards, sight word games, matching activities and highly motivational word recognition tasks were used initially on an individual basis. When high achievement stimulated the desire for peer recognition, more group learning experiences were introduced and developed. Through the use of these sight word developmental activities a reservoir of words was being mastered so that they could later serve as a stairway to independent reading tasks. These same words were being used and their learnings reinforced, by having them incorporated as part of their writing lesson. Penmanship contests were then introduced as a means of stimulating greater efforts. As ego-restoration appeared to be taking place within the

group, subtle demands for the encouragement of more assertive behavior on a verbal level were introduced. We did this by creating purposes for communicating more actively.

One such technique was the use of the novelty shop eight ball paper weight. This ball when rotated several times supplies an answer to a question that can be answered in the affirmative, negative or obtusely. This answer appears on the bottom of the ball in a windowed area. Initially, only the non-inhibited child would attempt this with provocative questions. This provided the other two boys with vicarious experiences. Shortly, they too began using the ball in a more appropriate manner. At times questions aroused certain latent feelings, these were handled in as much of a "life space" approach as possible. In addition, pertinent information of feelings was also fed back to the child's therapist to be handled in a more therapeutic climate. We also found this technique worked quite effectively as a motivation for reading.

Another technique used to stimulate more verbalization was the use of content areas in science. Each week a science demonstration was performed during the last part of the school period. These demonstrations were of a highly dramatic nature, pre-arranged, with little explanation preceding the action. Upon their completion, a purpose for inquiry was established, with considerable questioning and requests on the part of the group to take part in re-doing the demonstration. Through techniques as I have just illustrated, considerable group involvement occurred characterized by an increased motivation to learn and do more. As these positive attitudes began to replace the earlier ones it was possible to obtain a clearer

picture of the specific nature of the boys' learning problems. When these began to emerge it was then possible to develop through "prescriptive teaching" techniques, tailored remedial learning experiences for each child.

We began introducing more formal reading materials in larger and larger doses. Although these materials paralleled traditional school books, the one conspicuous difference was that no basal reading system was used at all. High-interest low-vocabulary story books were made use of to support reading competencies. Supplemental workbooks, which were introduced later, were independently used to develop word attack skills, comprehension and independent reading habits. In many instances, the entire vocabulary of some books was presented in a programed manner to equip the child to read independently and aloud, often for the first time. Much success, therefore, was assured and the ego-massaging qualities of this approach supported greater sustained efforts at reading.

PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

Complimenting and reinforcing what was occurring in the school period were the other prongs of the program. As negative attitudes and resistance to learning began to diminish, it was possible to adapt learning experiences for each child on the basis of his particular educational problems. These learning experiences were not only conducted in the formal school period, they were also correlated and enhanced through the other activities in the program. Therefore, the use of the other three prongs of the program supported significant advances in the school area.

The Handwork period served as a laboratory for evaluating and developing fine motor skills, independent work habits, following directions and completing projects that provided maximum ego-gratification. Projects presented were short-term that could be completed within the daily program structure. All projects were designed to serve a correlated function. Not only were they intrinsically motivating, they also drew heavily from areas that reinforced the training of certain perceptual deficits, such as visual and auditory training, eye-handedness and right-left orientation. Many of the teaching aids used were developed and completed by the students themselves during handwork periods. Some of these teaching aids were flash cards made by using ink spattering, coat hanger and bead abicuses, dioramas, letter and word recognition games, calendars, clocks, thermometers, to name just a few. In many instances, to stimulate group cohesiveness, group projects were selected by the students. Planning through group meetings, where each student selected an area of work, was held preceding the handwork period. The handwork experience, in some cases, was the only vehicle that could be used to motivate engagement in the learning process. Even with children who could see the obviousness of some of the projects being related to school work and negatively reacting, the use of a diversity of materials and medias introduced was too stimulating for them to resist. Those students who appeared to have excellent strengths in this area were gaining much in the way of ego-gratification and peer approval. Completed projects took on even greater meaning to the students when they were brought to regular school and shared with their larger peer group.

An interesting technique used, in the presentation of projects to this group, was the absence of teacher completed project models. We found where successful experiences had been at a premium for these children in the past, it was necessary to initially present goals that could be attainable within a reasonable effort level. Therefore, it seemed logical not to set adult standards for a group of students whose egos had already been underdeveloped. Models used were either those contributed by other groups or models prepared by a staff member imitating what a child's project could look like. In most instances the children responded well to this approach and appeared reassured that they could obtain similar results or (most importantly) better results.

Physical education and recreation followed the handwork period, providing the students with an opportunity for ventilating anxiety and developing large motor skills through structured activities. These activities, in addition to their physical appeal, were also adapted to include specific perceptual training tasks. Among these tasks were listening games such as "Simon Says", "Red Light, Green Light", "Streets and Alleys" and others designed to stimulate auditory attentiveness through verbal commands. Large motor games and activities were introduced after a period of time was spent developmentally preparing the group for these more aggressive activities. Simple table games were used with those children too inhibited to participate. It was during this part of the program where much group interaction took place, which identified certain anxieties and fears that could be handled in "life space" problem areas most meaningfully. Support and reassurance that destructive

impulses can be expressed without harming themselves and others was quite therapeutically useful to stimulating more participation. Low-keyed competitive games were developed and conducted by the group after competencies of the individual skills required were mastered. We found the reluctance and inability to participate in games that required individual performance was due to insufficient mastery of the skills involved. Baseball skills such as throwing, catching, batting and running were all taught independently of one another for many weeks before the students actually began having games. In all cases there was a marked improvement in attitude towards these competitive games, characterized by greater interest, involvement and participation. The ego-enhancing value gained from success in this area helped dramatically in restoring enough confidence in some children to support efforts at competition with neighborhood peers.

The final prong of the program was snack and story time. These two areas of nurturance, "reading and feeding", had significance to the group as a reward reinforcement. Minimal restrictions were placed on the amount consumed during the story time. The reading and eating took place simultaneously until such time that interest in the story and conversing with one another proved more gratifying than the snacks themselves. During this later stage the boys were more interested in reading themselves than they were with being read to. Gradually they began requesting turns at reading aloud themselves. Although reading skills were still quite weak in most, their desire to try in front of the small group was indeed supported. This aspect of the program served to enhance termination on an optimum gratification level.

Augmenting the work done in Day Treatment was the intensive involvement of the psychiatric team in working with the parents and children individually. Much feedback was obtained from both workers in weekly team staff conferences. These conferences enabled the Day Treatment staff to handle, sensitively, areas of conflict that appeared in individual treatment. Therapists seeing children following Day Treatment were often made aware of conflicts in the school period that could be worked through in play therapy. The workers seeing the parents weekly were informed as to the dynamics of certain changes in the child's behavior that might prove threatening to the parents. The staff psychologists who administered the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities, in addition to their usual psychological test batteries, shared their results with the Day Treatment teaching staff. They were most useful in helping to individualize our instructional methods and enhance our "prescriptive teaching" approaches. This total team approach was further enhanced by scheduling frequent public school conferences to evaluate and assist the regular school teacher in dealing with the child in a large group. This conjoint planning for all the children in this group proved invaluable when total re-entry into public school appeared warranted. The Day Treatment staff worked closely with classroom teachers, attempting to share with them techniques of instruction and management.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The psychoeducational small group approach used to meet the needs of these children with severe learning disorders has brought about

favorable results. It is important to note that this program initially had been a limited program. At the time of this writing this agency is relocating into new and expanded quarters. These new facilities will enable us to provide full day programing for children with these difficulties. During the period described in this paper our limited programing consisted of three hours a week until gradual expansion allowed us, in September, 1966, to increase the time to five hours weekly. It is our feeling that increased frequency of contacts, i.e. daily attendance, would help markedly in reinforcing learnings far more effectively than our initial twice-weekly contacts did. Despite this factor, results of our experiences with this group indicated the most substantial gains were made on a behavioral level. The evaluative techniques used were observational rather than statistical. One of the most useful sources of observational data was the gain reported by the Public school personnel. As was mentioned earlier, most of the children in our program remained in their regular classes. This provided us with an excellent laboratory to determine change on a more objective level.

The number of children served in this program over the period was six. Two of these children were not in school at all until they entered the Day Treatment group. As a result of gains made in the group by the child, and mother, in individual weekly case-work interviews, one child was re-entered in public school and is currently functioning well in a full time school plan. The second child has been recently entered into a parochial school conjointly with Day Treatment and is being readied for full parochial school

attendance shortly. The other four children were in conjoint programing for an average period of one year. They have all re-entered full-time school plans and are reportedly doing well. The teachers of these four children in conjoint programing all reported significant changes on the part of these boys within the first two months of attendance in Day Treatment. Their observations ranged from increased participation in classroom work to more spontaneous verbal recitation where none existed prior to Day Treatment. Although academic skills remained weak, the children were all reported to be more attentive, better related to peers, and in general appeared less anxious and happier. Schools that could make available remedial instruction for these children, to supplement large classroom instruction, did so with consultative service offered by the Day Treatment staff.

Clinical observations supported the schools' impressions in most cases. The child therapists reported an increased ability at sustaining conversation related to assertive behavior on the part of other children. More concern with aggressiveness and the attending fears were expressed through the play therapy sessions. In general, most therapists saw more self-assertive behavior than they had observed prior to Day Treatment. Caseworkers reported more concern expressed by parents as a result of this behavior at home. Parent contacts with the Agency became somewhat more intensive throughout this period, perhaps because of needed support in dealing with their child's more assertive behavior. School follow-up on these children has indicated that sustained improvement continues on a behavioral and attitudinal level. Their academic skills show

gradual gains and, in instances where remedial instruction in small groups is available, progress is more evident. Two children, who have left the program and are in full-time public schools, continue to see their individual therapists on a weekly basis. The parents of these children are also seen on a regular appointment basis by caseworkers.

The results of this limited program for the past year have confirmed our belief that full-time programing for children with severe learning disorders can bring about desired improvements on both behavioral and academic levels. Therefore, as we move into full-time programing in our Day Treatment Unit one such group will be carefully studied. Thirty hours a week of programing will enable us to develop a more comprehensive remedial academic plan and to collect more quantitative data to evaluate instructional gains.

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